

# Researches on Ptolemy's Geography of Eastern Asia,

by Colonel G. E. Gerini, M. R. A. S.

(Review) By W. Makepeace.

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Starting with Ptolemy's Extra-Gangetic Geography, the writer has felt obliged, owing to the uncertainty of previous identifications of place and race names to review all the ancient geography relating to the Seven Seas including that of the Arabs, the Hindoos, the Chinese and the early European navigators.

The book will therefore become a handbook to the historical student. As the result of his researches the author believes that "It is perhaps not too sanguine to anticipate that future historiographers of those lands may see their way to adopt the Ptolemaic data as the starting point for their enquiries and narratives to which, even for latter periods, when authentic records fail or are fragmentary, they should be at times of help in understanding the political condition of the country."

Not a few sidelights are supplied even in the present volume. One of the points incontrovertibly established, says the author, is that Western trade pushed along the China coast at least as far as the Hang Chou harbour since the beginning of the Christian era.

A useful map is given in which the geographical knowledge of travellers of various nationalities and periods is displayed by the various colours in which the names are printed.

But the leading feature of the book is the map and series of tables, containing Ptolemy's names, in both of which is shown the authors' own method of rectifying Ptolemy's records of longitude and latitude. This discovery establishes Ptolemy's credit as an accurate geographer.

The identification of Akadra as the modern Kha-Tien on the gulf of Siam furnished the initial base beyond the Ganges which made the work possible. Further identifications based on this disclose by the way that Ptolemy's geography gives us the outposts occupied at that early period by the Indian Colonists who were pressing southwards.

A bold alteration is made to the traditional fixing of Ptolemy's farther coast line of the Magnus Sinus (Gulf of Tonkin). Ptolemy shared the impression of his contemporaries that the coast of Sinai, the modern Hakka country, turned southward to the equator thus enclosing the Green Sea. Colonel Gerini induced by the good results obtained in identifying place names, swings this coast line round the Lin Chau peninsula to the N.E., till it coincides with the actual coast line of China.

Six-hundred and eighty pages are closely packed with discussions on detailed identifications.

Turning to Sec. 6, the Golden Chersonese, we find that up to the date of the Christian era the present southern part of the peninsula was known as Chrysé or the "Golden Isle." The last mention of it as an island may be dated about A.D. 50. After that, in Marinus and Ptolemy, it has become a peninsula. Our author thinks that the change of name corresponded with the fact that until our era seagoing ships did ply through the channel broken by ridges of rock, which separated Kedah from Ban Don. The seacaves are now found in the ridges at an elevation of 100 feet but the passage can almost be effected by small boats to-day and it is suggested that the original channel is a more suitable site for a canal than the Kra Isthmus farther north. The usual trade route however at a later date seems to have led over the Kra Isthmus.

Takota, of which the name is connected with tin or lead, was a mart and lay between the Kra Isthmus and the old sea channel.

With regard to Palanda, a Malay name in Ptolemy of a town and a river, the notes and the rectification map are in favour of the neighbourhood of Kuala Kampar, though an

addendum mentions Pahang, while the synoptical map and the tables, which have been revised since publication in the R. A. S. J. 1897, are for a site in Pahang.

Tharra, an inland town, is placed in Tringanu, but this arrangement depends on the original identification of Palanda near Kuala Kampar which has been considered the less probable one.

Sabana was a mart in Selangor, and Cape Malen Kolon is Tanjong Gelang in Pahang. This name is connected with the name Malaya, which was imported into the peninsula by the early inhabitants of Southern India in their flight from the Aryans.

The Attaba River is the Tringanu River, and Koli was a town in Kelantan.

The difficulties with which the author was surrounded must have been immense, and definite conclusions as to the identifications attempted here will perhaps always be doubtful. This section of the book will probably be more useful for the historical and philological research it contains than for anything it proves. It must be remembered too that Ptolemy shortened the Peninsula considerably making the extreme promontories point East and West and that he did not know of land lying South of the Pahang River.